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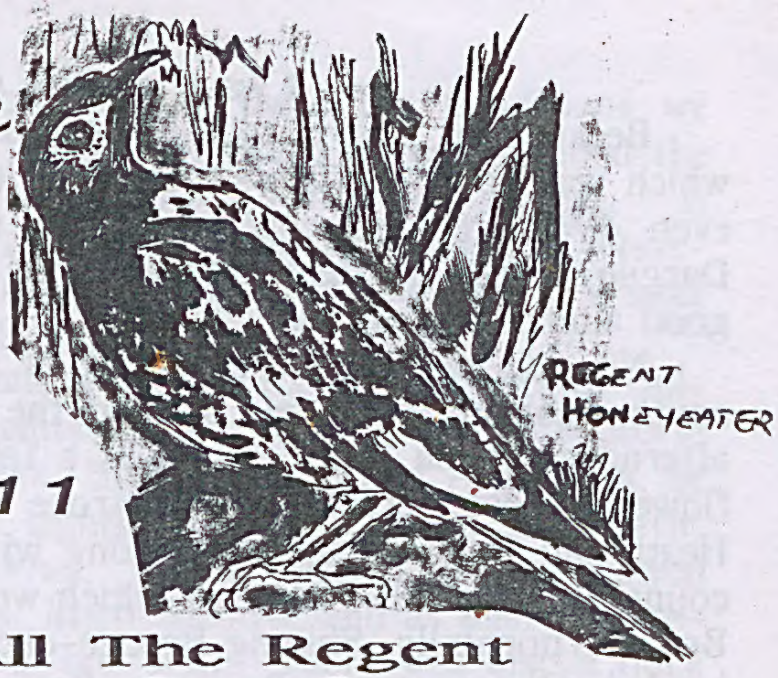

Where Have All The Regent Honeyeaters Gone?

Once occuring in flocks of thousands in the woodlands and forests on either side of the Great Dividing Range, Regent Honeyeaters have undergone a dramatic decline over the last fifty years or so. It is thought that less than 1500 of the flashy black, white and gold birds survive, with possibly less that 100 in Victoria, making it one of this State's most wanted birds.

Like many endangered species the principal cause of the dramatic decline is thought to be loss, fragmentation and reduction in quality of habitat. The loss of box and ironbark woodlands on the western slopes of the range, in particular, has had a major impact on Regent Honeyeaters.

Regent Honeyeaters are mobile birds, searching for patches of box and ironbark trees that produce high volumes of nectar. This behaviour makes it an elusive and difficult bird to study. However, each spring they generally return to a few remaining favoured areas to breed. The last remaining major breeding site in Victoria is around Chiltern.

Each year following breeding the Regent Honeyeaters leave these breeding areas and disappear. It is hoped that this summer will be the year when we finally discover where these elusive birds go. The few reports recieved suggest that the birds may move along watercourses and visit gardens in search of much needed nectar.

The Regent Honeyeater Recovery Team is seeking assistance in helping find these birds. All records of Regent Honeyeaters, regardless of where and when are important. Information obtained will assist in increasing our understanding of where and how these birds utilise the remaining remnants of our woodlands. Anyone locating these birds should contact David Geering, the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Coordinator, on (Freecall) 1800 621 056. It is important that reports be passed on as soon as possible in order to maximise the information that can be obtained from these records.

David Geering

Dargile Outing

Because of heavy rain for the three days before the last outing, which was to be at Terrick Terrick, the Ranger rang to advise that not even 4WD vehicles could get into the park, so it was decided that Dargile, north of Heathcote and not far from Costerfield, would be a good alternative outing.

No one regretted the change of plans as we walked around to the south west of the picnic area in the morning and to the north in the afternoon. Pine heath, which is a feature of the forest, still had some flowers, there were lots of Primrose Goodenias, Finger Flowers, Daphne Heath and Blue Pincushions, along with a few other flowers, and a bird count of 34 species, some of which were Yellow Robin, Buff-rumped and Brown Thornbills, Shining Bronze-cuckoo, Red-browed Finches, Brown-headed Honeyeaters, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Brown Tree-creepers and White-browed Babblers.

One of the highlights of the day was a Weebill nest, with the bird skittering around in the leaves as we watched. It eventually went back onto the nest to the delight of the audience. All this was at only a little above head height.

Rita Mills

All this led to, the following weekend, -

The Unofficial Campout at Terrick Terrick

OR

"The Camp Where Six Plain Wanderers Went in Search of the Elusive Plains Wanderer"

At short notice a campout to Terrick Terrick State and National Parks was convened. Rita, Maggie and Enid arrived on the Friday and were joined by George, Maureen and Ken on Saturday morning.

It was a camp full of highlights. Firstly, we camped under a stand of trees occupied by a family of Southern Boobooks; Mum, Dad and two young'uns. We followed with great interest their daytime and evening activities. (I wish my grandsons could sit as still and quietly for such long periods!) However our presence must have been too disturbing as they had moved camp by Sunday morning.

We also found a wonderful bird nesting tree. A tall Yellow Box with a Brown Falcon nest complete with chick, who obliged us by appearing over the rim to perform his gymnastics with wing-flexing exercises. There were two other nests built into the lower part of the pile of sticks that constituted the nest of the raptor, and three others in close proximity in the same tree. All were being used by a very active group (8-12) of Diamond Firetails. Then, to complete the housing complex, there was a large nesting hole below for the cellar dwellers.

After a long Saturday afternoon walk in quite hot conditions we came across a wonderful "collection" of birds, which Maggie dubbed the "Black and White Show", within the White Cyprus-pine forest. It consisted of White-winged Trillers, Magpies, Hooded Robins, White-winged Choughs, Willie Wagtail, Restless Flycatcher and Jacky Winter (admittedly a lighter shade of black!).

The bird numbers were good and although the list of species only numbered 43 they were nearly all quality birds. We saw several raptors, including Little Eagle, Brown Goshawk, Brown Falcon and Australian, or Nankeen, Kestrel. Other notable sightings were Crested Shrike-tit, White-browed Babbler, Peaceful Dove, Varied Sitella, White-browed Wood-swallows, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Mistletoebird, and as many White-winged Trillers as I have ever seen in one area. There was also a flock of 50 Dusky Wood-swallows in flight.

During our Sunday morning cuppa we were treated to a wonderful display of nature. It started with the appearance of a goanna (a Lace Monitor) lumbering past our picnic spot, about 15 metres away. George and Rita immediately went for their cameras. The goanna decided "This is not for me!", and promptly climbed the nearest tree. This provoked a reaction from Dad Boobook who had relocated his family from our campsite to the picnic site 50m away. He swooped the goanna and this action activated all the other small birds in the Cyprus-pine forest who immediately declared Sunday "Anti-Boobook Day". He was physically attacked by White-plumed Honeyeaters and Willie Wagtails, and suffered considerable verbal abuse by a myriad of Brown Tree-creepers (also nesting nearby), a Hooded Robin and Crested Shrike-tit. He kept swivelling his head 180° to keep an eye on his tormentors, and ducking and dodging as they swooped on him.

After about 30 minutes the drama slowly drew to a conclusion when the goanna decided he had had enough, climbed down out of the tree (the second he'd tried to take refuge in!) and headed off while the attention all seemed to be on the Boobook. We last saw him determinedly disappearing into the distance.

Eventually we headed off in search of our main venture, the habitat of the elusive Plains Wanderer.

Over lunch afterwards we discussed the outcome of our morning search, and unanimously decided that, seeing that we now know where the Plains Wanderer "ain't", our chances of success at the next campout will be greatly improved!

A wonderful weekend was had by all, even if George did have matress troubles and a very hard bed on Saturday night!

Ken Dredge

There were even quite a few flowers to be seen on the campout. The Deanes Wattle, a feature of the Park, was still in flower, as were the Primrose Goodenias, Bluebells, New Holland Daisies and three or four

different everlastings, but the best show was probably the Rock Isotome. The Yellow Box trees were also in flower, and we expected to see far more species of honeyeater than we did - White-plumed and Fuscous being the only ones we recorded.

One of the highlights of Maggie's, Enid's and my Saturday morning walk came as we sat under the shade of a tree for about half an hour and had Striated Pardalotes coming to feed in a sapling only feet from us. The evening before, as we got back from our walk, we found that our camp was very close to a Brown Tree-creeper family and the fledglings were old enough to be venturing outside the hollow, clinging and climbing as they waited for the parents to return.

Another Brown Treecreeper incident came for me as I was sitting at a picnic table sketching a gnarled old tree just near the table when an adult bird popped out of the split in the limb and sat there for a short time. Later I was able to get a couple of shots of one of the parents as it came in with food, and as it left again.

Rita Mills

BABBLINGS FROM BARKERS CREEK #13

Ravens and Crows

At this time of year, particularly late in the morning, the quietness of our block is sometimes disturbed by a *"caw caw caaaaaw"*, the advertising call of the Australian Raven, *Corvus coronoides*.

Memories and visions come to mind of my early youth, like being told: "If you want something useful to do then go and shoot those "bloody crows" and of the stories of how the "crows" attacked the lambs during lambing season and stole eggs from broody "chooks". Their call still makes me uneasy.

There are five members of the Australian *Corvidæ* family. The Australian Raven is the largest. The Little Raven is also common to Victoria, and, although mainly found in Tasmania, the Forest Raven *Corvis tasmanicas* is also found in the Otways and South-western Victoria. Once included with the Forest Raven, a new species, the Relict Raven *Corvus boreas* has been recognised in recent times in New South Wales. It has larger wing feathers and a longer tail than the Forest Raven.

There are also two species of crow in Australia, the Little Crow, *Corvus bennetti*, and the Torresian Crow *Corvus orru*. The Little Crow can be seen in the Mallee.

So these large black birds that you may see in your paddocks, backyards, on the roadside or on the golf course are likely to be ravens, possibly Australian Ravens. Their territorial call is long and drawn out, the long throat hackles are raised with the throat and body held in a

horizontal position. The Australian Ravens are territorial and mate for life. Little Ravens, unlike the Australian Raven, are nomadic and will be seen in flocks (sometimes in hundreds).

Corvids build large bowl shaped nests high in a tree or in a man made structure. Females incubate the eggs and tend the chicks while the males provide the food. After fledging, the young Australian Ravens will often only remain with their parents for just a few months before seeking a new territory. The exception is where the food resources are excellent and then the offspring will remain in the territory to form cooperative breeding.

Recent research has shown that, contrary to rumour, ravens kill very few lambs as their beak structure is such that they can only eat soft or decaying carrion, hence their presence beside roadside kills. While often seen near a dying or dead lamb, research has shown that these lambs are weak, left by the ewe perhaps because of a shortage of food. Ravens are opportunistic feeders, eating insects in recently ploughed land, spilt grain and grasshoppers. Farmers have come to realize that ravens have an important role to play in the removal of carrion (a breeding place for flies), as well as coming to their assistance during plagues of locusts.

So it is great to realize that, "Stone the 'ravens' there is no 'caws' to worry"!

John Turnbull

References : Land for Wildlife news, Kate Stothers
Birds of Australia, Peter Rowlands
www.shades-of-night.com/corvi29/index.html

November Birds, 61 Hunter Street

The abundant blossoms of the Weeping Bottlebrush in our back garden have many constant visitors, and there are daily skirmishes as they compete for a share of the nectar. Beside Red Wattlebirds and Silvereyes, there have been New Holland Honeyeaters - including two juveniles - Eastern Spinebills, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, and the aggressive Fuscous Honeyeaters.

Once again the Crimson Rosellas have occupied the nest box, although a solitary Eastern Rosella appears occasionally to check out the increasingly loud chirrupings emerging from the box before he is driven away by the parent birds.

Each morning we waken to the sound of a Bronzewing Pigeon calling from the garden at "Buda" across the road.

For the rest, we have our resident Blackbird pair and a Magpie, as well as Yellow-rumped Thornbills, "grazing" on the lawn.

Shirley Parnaby.

Observations

* Margaret Willis enjoyed watching some young ducklings waddling across the lily leaves on Lake Johanna. She had a eucalypt flowering in her garden with the Red Wattlebirds defending it from all comers, including some Musk Lorikeets.
* Margaret Hunter was pleased when four young Masked Lapwings were hatched on their property, but all have disappeared, and she wonders if Kookaburras might be the culprits. It was suggested that foxes might be, but she doubted it as the "Foxoff" program has been very successful this year.
* The flowering of the Yellow Gum at Broadways has attracted lots of White-plumed Honeyeaters and Musk Lorikeets.
* At the Cup weekend BOCA camp at Yannac near Nhill the quantity of sightings was small, but the quality made up for it, and a highlight reported by Ken and Marjorie Cross was a Wedgetails' nest close to the ground and a wonderful sighting of the young exercising their wings. The parents were also seen.
* Neighbour (granddaughter) was much worried about a fledgling Galah with damaged eye which had been in their yard at the side of the drive in the rain for quite some time and no parents, as far as they knew, had been to it. It was collected in a towel, but returned outside when the parents were around again. It's screeches brought them to the spot and they led it away and up into a tree. It was one from the nest which had Mynahs hanging around a few days before, in the back yard at North Castlemaine and it's possible that they had damaged the eye as they had got right down to the nest. However, all seemed well, but next morning there was circumstantial evidence of Tuans in the yard, as the body of the fledgling was found beneath the tree, headless. Tuans will eat just the head, and sometimes the chest contents of larger prey. Incidently, the cat which is in a nearby cage was also bitten on the neck by an unknown something that same night. Rita Mills
* Marg Hunter's Jack Russell terrier killed a Tiger Snake in the house garden at Faraday the week before the last meeting.
* George Evens reported seeing a wallaby at the Happy Valley end of Mostyn Street some time back.
* Seen in a paddock at the side of the road between Dingee and Prarie - a pair of Brolgas in company with Straw-necked Ibis. Rita Mills, Maggie Oliver and Enid Chapman.
* The ancient and decrepit Acacia farnesiana (Sweet Acacia) which is located near the pump house in the Botanic Gardens and against the fence on Downes Road has produced a crop of large golden bolssoms in the section of the tree which is still alive. It is listed as one of the significant trees in the Gardens, and its estimated age in 1991 was 80 years! It is the only known specimen in cultivation in Victoria. Shirley Parnaby.
* Also from Shirley - "There are at least two families of Coot chicks on Lake Johanna in the gardens. Originally one female had seven, but at present they both have five."
* At Taradale Ann and Hans van Gemert have had a White-faced Heron resident on their dam for most of the year, but he would disapplear for a few weeks at a time, they wondered if it was because it was the breeding season. This year he has returned, to their delight, with the the whole family - Mum and three fledglings who sit together on a branch of one tree while Mum and Dad call, trying to coax them to fly.
* Chris Morris reports that the Willie Wagtail is still around the house at Little Bendigo, and still on his own for most of the time, and still aggressive as ever. However, just recently he was surprised to see four Willies, just on the edge of this one's territory, sitting together on the fence quite amicably.
* Both George Broadway and Maggie Oliver commented that they had been surprised this year not to have heard the Horsfields Bronze Cuckoo, but both have heard the Shining Bronze. However George reported that he and Phee got home from an outing in the last week in November to hear the familiar call of the Horsfields nearby, and found it perched on a neighbour's fence.

February 12 is the date of the Annual General Meeting. The nomination form for office bearers and Committee members is enclosed.

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING

This is the text of a letter sent from the Ringwood Field Natualist Club to the CFNC membership

Dear Barbara,

On behalf of the members of Ringwood Field Naturalist Club who attended your Get-together weekend in September I would like to thank you and your Club for taking the time to host such an event.

Not even the slightly inclement weather could dampen the weekend's pleasure, although I understand those walking with Ern Perkins on the Saturday returned slightly damp. Feedback from those members in attendance is nothing but praise for the range of excursions, including the dawn breakfast, and the fact they had been thoroughly researched. In addition, the speakers on both Friday and Saturday night, were worth hearing. I was particularly interested in Tim Entwisle and found his talk to be quite fascinating.

All in all, the weekend was a great success with the chance to catch up on old friends and make new ones from different areas. The efforts expended by your Club towards the weekend should be applauded. Please pass on our congratualtions.

Signed, Peter F Rogers

The next V.F.N.C.A. Campout will be held at Camps Coorong and Coolamatong on the Banksia Penninsula on the northern side of Lake Victoria in the Gippsland Lakes, by the Sale and District Field Naturalist Club, on Friday 5th to Monday 8th of March 1999. All meals are provided from Friday night to lunch on Monday.

Bedrooms accommodate 2, 3 or 4 people - the neighbouring venues have been booked so only bottom bunks need be used. Campers will need to bring their own linen. If preferred Motel and Caravan Parks are available in Bairnsdale 15 minutes away. Bairnsdale is a large provincial town with all facilities.

Anticipated costs will be -

Registration, Insurance and incidentals - $ 23.00
Accommodation 5 - 8 March - $110.00

For those not staying at Camps Coorong or Coolamatong meals are obtainable. Packed lunches $5.00 Dinner $7.50

Banksia Peninsula is within easy reach of forests, lakes and wetlands. It is a short boat trip across the lake to the famous Ninety Mile Beach. The excursions will focus on geomorphology, botany, ornithology and environmental issues. There will be access to places which are normally fairly inaccessible, therefore some excursions will require travel by boat. When application forms are sent out excursions involving boat travel, (and therefore extra cost) will be clearly marked.

Bookings are now being accepted, and require $23 registration and insurance plus $17 deposit for accommodation if you wish to stay at Camps Coorong or Coolamatong. Further information will be sent to your home address after the New Year.

Cheques, made payable to Sale & District Field Naturalist Club, should be sent to the Club C/o P & N Garlick, RMB 4755 Sth Gippsland Highway, Stradbroke, 3851.

Dick Southcombe of Geelong FNC is arranging an 11 passenger Hire and Drive bus from Geelong which will cost $40 -$50 depending on numbers, duration , route, etc., for the campout . He will book a second bus providing someone offers to drive and sufficient people require it .

Dick and his passengers intend staying at the Mitchell Gardens Cartavan Park in Bairnsdale on Monday night 8/3/99 before returning home next day. Shared accommodation will be approx. $12.

If you want Dick to book you a seat on the Geelong bus please sent a deposit of $20 for the bus plus $10 accommodation charge for each person, no later that Jan 1 1999. Dick's address is 4 Peary St. Belmont 3216. Ph 52 433 916.

Complete details of the Campout and Dick's offer, and the booking form, are available from the secretary, Barbara Maund.

C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.
Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.
Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.
VISITORS ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

* *

Fri Dec 11 **Regent Honeyeaters.** Speaker, David Gearing. This is a change from the advertised program as we have the opportunity in December to hear this very interesting speaker. Based in Melbourne, David Geering has studied the breeding Biology of Regent Honeyeaters in New South Wales for three years. 8pm UCA hall. "Bring a Plate" supper. (The Members and Visitors night will now be held in February).

Sat Dec 12 **Tullaroop Res. BYO Picnic Tea.** Leader M. Oliver. Official leaving time from 13 Mostyn St. will be 3.30pm, but some people might like to make their own way out at an earlier time.

Fri Feb. 12 1999 **ANNUAL MEETING and Members and Visitors Night.** Remember to take the camera with you during the summer break, and be ready to contribute some of your own nature slides to the evening's program!

Members are invited to nominate members for office or committee Nomination forms should be signed by two members of the Club and accompanied by the writted consent of the candidate, and should reach the secretary by the last Friday in January.

Additional forms are obtainable from the secretary.

Sat Feb 11 **Muckleford Gorge** (to be confirmed)

* *

Committee; G. Broadway (Pres.), M. Dredge (V.P.), B. Maund (Sec.), M. Badminton (Treas.), R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), J. Turnbull, M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, E. Perkins.

Subscriptions – Ordinary membership: Single $16, Family $24
Pensioner/student: Single $12, Family $18 Supporting : $25
Newsletter posted: Membership + $6

There is a recommendation from the Committee that from next year all memberships should include the additional $6 for postage. This would keep members in touch even when they are not able to attend a meeting. Some additional copies would be left in the library for purchase by non-members.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.
Incorporation Nº A3010